**GENERAL SYNOD**

**July 2018**

**Debate on Nuclear Weapons**

It was my privilege and joy to ordain 17 rather wonderful men and women in Portsmouth cathedral last weekend.

And words I spoke at the two ordination services have stayed with me as I have repeatedly thought about our debate this afternoon. That we are called, as the service says, to be heralds of Christ’s kingdom. In how we order our lives, words and actions – and who we live them for. And in so doing show what that kingdom looks like.

I can think of nothing that speaks less of God’s kingdom than nuclear weapons. And I earnestly pray for a day when the earth is rid of them. I pray with equal earnestness that we, God’s people, strive with ever greater efforts to create a world in which they will be no longer necessary.

To contribute to that sign of the kingdom requires of us the attributes Christ himself required of his disciples – words perhaps that might also be included in a bishop’s advice to the newly ordained: that we be as wise as serpents and as innocent as doves.

Innocent, absolutely. Innocent in holding to what is good and true to help us discern the coming of the kingdom. And bodying it forth in the world.

But wise too in knowing that this world is fallen and fallen people seek and abuse power – and that we must be wise enough to meet their challenge and keep safe what is good.

So I welcome all wise attempts to rid the world of nuclear weapons. But we must demonstrate the wisdom of disciples in doing so – lest we leave ourselves open to the suggestion, perhaps even the accusation - that the good looks more like the naïve (because it fails to be wise and realistic).

I would make one further point. As I stood at the crossing of Portsmouth Cathedral last Saturday I was reminded once again that it is the Cathedral of the Sea – and is too a particular home to the memory of those who have served in peril on the sea.

We, the church, and the church in a city like Portsmouth in particular, have a special duty towards those tens of thousands of fine young men and women, in all the armed forces, who put themselves in harm’s way to keep us safe. That they must do so is, alas, a sign of just how fallen our world is. But we must honour the service they give. And know that our own freedom to follow God’s call is guaranteed by their service.

We live in a world in which they are necessary – but must work for one where they may beat their swords into ploughshares.

*Rt Rev Christopher Foster*

*Bishop of Portsmouth*